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ABSTRACT

This study explored classroom teachers' roles as reflective decision makers, surveying 260 K-12 teachers about professional development, teaching strategies, textbooks, testing and measurement, and mechanisms they used to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful teaching methods. Results indicate that nearly all of the teachers think about the effectiveness of their lessons after they are taught, though only 17 percent maintain a log or journal of reflections about their teaching. About 35 percent rarely or never use the same activities for all their classes, while 22 percent frequently or always do. Though most teachers seek new ideas about teaching through staff development and/or graduate classes, only half feel they are offered regular staff development opportunities on reflective teaching. Only 18 percent of teachers seek feedback from their students about lesson effectiveness. Nearly 80 percent say their easiest lessons are those in which they are most interested, and 75 percent believe that focusing on student achievement on state tests sometimes, almost always, or always limits their creativity. Most educators consider themselves reflective. About 40 percent judge lesson success in terms of their students. Responses differ significantly between elementary and secondary teachers in 8 of 18 statements. (SM)

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**Putting Theory into Practice: Reflective Teaching and Implications for Use**

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**New Orleans, Louisiana**

**A. Objective or Purpose:**

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of the teacher in the classroom as a reflective decision maker and to examine what implications, if any, that their collective reflective practices might have for use in professional education programs. The study explored the reflective orientation of the classroom teacher including individual introspection and review after lesson presentation, lesson accountability practices, and opportunities for professional development.

**B. Perspectives, Historical Framework:**

The notion of the teacher as a reflective educator is not a new one, but as the idea of reflection continues to evolve, so do the theoretical tenets and terminology underlying reflective thought and practice. From Dewey (1929) who called it "practical deliberation" when discussing teacher problem-solving practices to the more recent "critical reflection" term used when referring to teacher thinking and action (Nichols, Tippins, & Wieseman, 1997), the reflective teacher model has received much notice from the educational community over the years.

Posner (1993) believes that "reflective thinking allows the teacher to examine critically the assumptions that schools make about what can count as acceptable goals and methods, problems, and solutions" (p. 20). Similar to Posner's perspective, Abell and Bryan (1997) view the reflective teacher orientation as "a process of re-evaluating and reforming one's existing theories in light of perturbing evidence" (p. 154). Realistically, educators find themselves faced with finding constructive and proactive strategies to educate and meet the needs of a diverse student population. To accomplish this requires teachers at all levels of the educational process to critically evaluate their roles and actions and examine alternative ideas

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and practices that could conceivably provide students in the classroom with positive learning outcomes.

Teachers enter the classroom with their own set of ideas, beliefs, and values that have been shaped over time. Previous research has determined that teachers must be comfortable with change to implement it in their classrooms (Doyle & Ponder, 1979), and part of the change process involves reflective, decision-making on the part of the teacher. The reflection orientation model provides teachers with a mechanism to evaluate their teaching beliefs and actions.

### C. Methods, Techniques, Modes of Inquiry

A survey was distributed to 260 K-12 teachers; 60 of these teachers were secondary either middle school or high school while 200 were elementary. Teachers were primarily from the North Texas region although there were 4 respondents from outside the state.

The survey instrument focused on reflective teaching practices and consisted of a series of statements, on a Likert type-scale, that related to professional development, teaching strategies utilized in the classroom, textbook information, testing and measurement issues, and mechanisms employed by educators to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful teaching practices. Additional questions asked of the teachers were presented in an open-end question format.

### D. Data Analysis

Teacher surveys were gathered and responses aggregated and reduced for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to compare and contrast the answers of the 260 respondents. Frequencies and mean ratings were calculated for the Likert-scale portion of the survey while percentages were computed for the open-ended questions.

### E. Importance of Study

On any given day, classroom teachers make between 1,000 and 2,000 decisions. Recognizing how critical the "right" decision is frequently involves prior experience and reflective thought and practice. There appears to be increasing support for the reflective orientation model of teaching which advocates training preservice teachers in how to examine their role as a teacher and determine effective teaching strategies that are successful for them.

**Results of Quantitative Analysis**

**Mean Ratings on Survey**. A total of 260 teachers responded to the survey of which 200 were elementary and 60 were middle/secondary teachers. Frequencies and mean ratings were computed for all teachers for each of the 18 questions. Table 1 (attached) summarizes the mean rating for each statement and the frequency of ratings for each of the five likert choices on the survey. Some of the more interesting findings include the following:

1. 91% of teachers think about the effectiveness of their lessons after they are taught; yet only 17% maintain a log or journal of reflections about their teaching, and 30% write notations in their lesson plan books.
2. When asked whether they use the same activities for all their classes, 35% said they rarely or never do while 22% said they almost always or always do.
3. While 70% of teachers seek new ideas about teaching by attending staff development and/or graduate classes, only 51% feel that staff development opportunities to improve reflective teaching are offered regularly.
4. Only 18% of teachers seek feedback from their students about the effectiveness of the lesson.
5. 77% of teachers say their easiest lessons are those in which they are most interested. This finding might support much of the literature that claims a connection between the motivation and enthusiasm of the teacher and student learning.
6. 75% of teachers believe that focusing on student achievement on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) sometimes, almost always, or always limits their creativity. Only 25% felt that TAAS has little or no effect on their creativity. Since 40 teachers chose not to answer this item on the survey, the question is raised as to the possibility that many teachers did not feel comfortable answering this question at all.
7. 65% of teachers sometimes, almost always, or always feel overwhelmed trying to keep up with changes in the knowledge base in their area of expertise; 35% rarely or never feel overwhelmed.

**Comparing Responses of Elementary and Secondary Teachers** . Chart 1 (attached) illustrates the comparison in responses between elementary and secondary teachers. In 10 of the 18 statements, no significant difference was found in the mean ratings between the two groups. However, in eight (8) of the statements, significant differences (p. = <.05 or below) were found in the mean ratings between elementary and secondary teachers. Those items in which the differences were significant include the following:

1. Significantly more elementary teachers than secondary teachers:
   - Involve their students in daily activities that involve more than paper/pencil operations (p. < .01).
   - Attend professional development workshops and graduate classes in order to obtain new instructional ideas (p. < .01).
   - Try to keep up with changes in the content field by attending staff development or taking college credit courses p. < .01).
   - Feel more overwhelmed in the changing knowledge based in the subjects they teach (p. < .01).
   - Believe their teacher preparation programs prepared them to be reflective teachers (p. < .05).
   - Are likely to take the time to locate and use information on the Internet (p. < .05).

2. Significantly more secondary teachers than elementary teachers:
   - Maintain a log or journal to reflect on the day's activities ($p. < .05$).
   - Have confidence that the textbooks they are using are up-to-date and present good information on facts and concepts ($p. < .05$).

**Results of Qualitative Analysis.** Teachers who participated in the survey were asked to respond to four open-ended questions. The questions and analysis of teacher response follows.

**Question 1. Do you see yourself as a reflective teacher? Why or why not?**

The majority of educators (77.5%) who answered this survey identified themselves as reflective teachers. More secondary teachers (81.4%) than elementary teachers (76.5%) considered themselves to be reflective practitioners. Roughly 15% of both elementary and secondary groups responded that they were "somewhat" reflective while almost 4.0% of the elementary teachers and 2.4% of the secondary teachers said that they were not reflective practitioners. Another 5.0% of the elementary teachers and 3.0%% of the secondary teachers reported that they did not know what reflective teaching entailed. Approximately 8.0% who reported that they were reflective teachers submitted extended responses that indicated that they knew little, if anything, about reflective practice.

**Question 2. How do you decide if a lesson was successful or not?**

Teachers typically listed several different ways to determine if a presented lesson was successful. Almost 40% of those surveyed felt that they judged lesson success in terms of their students. Teachers noted that they gauged success based upon student interest, class participation, and interaction during activity. Twenty-six percent of the teachers indicated that tests also measure lesson success through student achievement. Another 14.0% said that lessons were successful if students were able to apply what they learned in another way. Other responses included specific student reaction to discussion (7.8%), hands-on activity (4.7%), and independent practice (4.4%).

**Question 3. What is your favorite lesson to teach? Why?**

The majority (83.4%) of both elementary and secondary teachers indicated that a favorite lesson did not necessarily entail a specific topic, but rather a favorite lesson transcended curriculum and centered around student activity and real life application. For example, one teacher, whose response was similar to many others wrote, "Any lesson is a favorite as long as it has real life application and interests my students." Math and science teachers favored those lessons that lend themselves to hands-on activity while reading teachers responded that a favorite lesson in literature represented the "core of learning."

**Question 4. What are the benefits of reflective teaching to you and to your class?**

Over 40.0% of elementary (47.2%) and secondary (42.6%) teachers felt that they, the teachers, benefited most from reflective practice because through self-evaluation of their lesson implementation, they are able to make adjustments/corrections for future use in the classroom. Fewer elementary teachers (17.3%) than secondary teachers (25.6%) indicated that the students benefit most from the reflective practice initiated by the teacher because students are the

recipients of the lesson change. Roughly 20.0% of both elementary and secondary teachers believed that both the teacher and student benefit equally from the reflective practice implemented by the teacher. Over 5.0% of teachers in both groups did not respond to this question.

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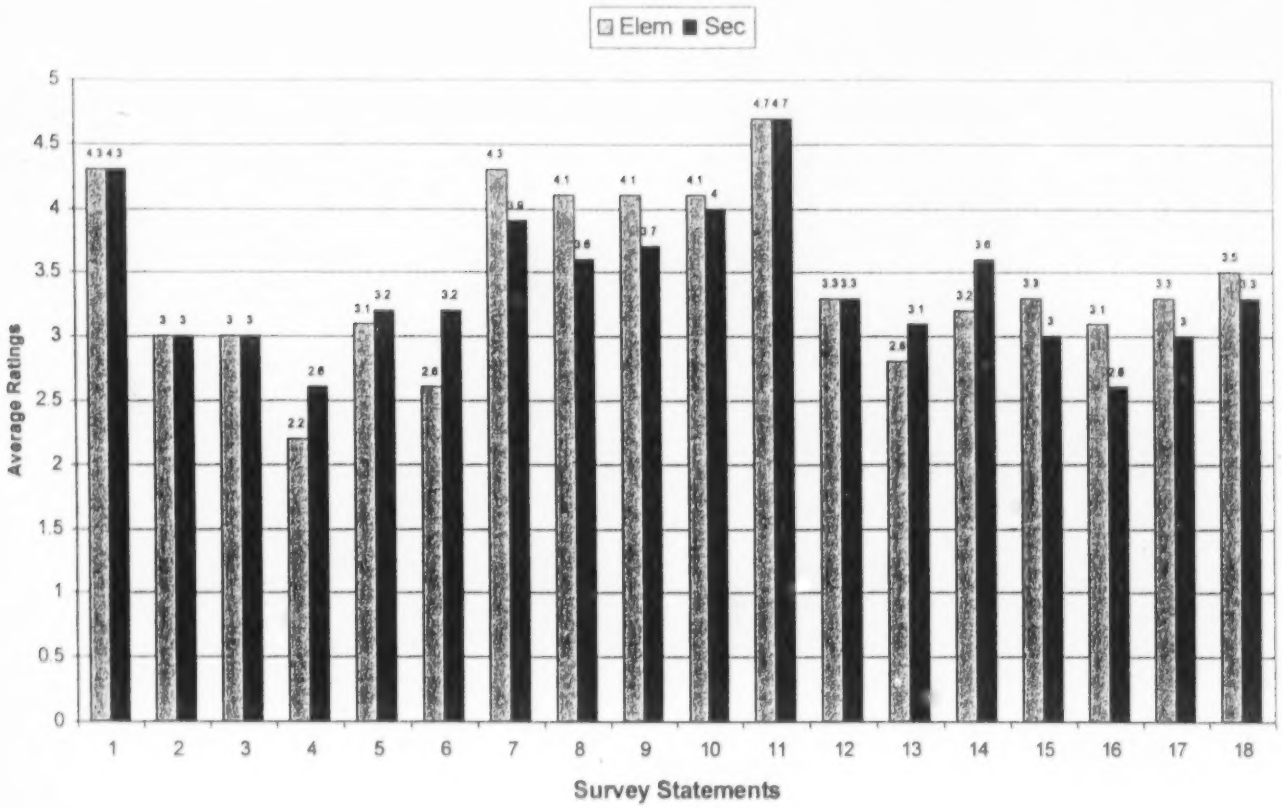
**Drs. Kelly, R. Stetson, E. Stetson, Taylor, Powell, & Miller**

## Table 1. Summary of Survey Data

| | Survey Questions | N | Ave. | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Almost Always | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | After I teach a lesson I think about what worked and what didn't. | 260 | 4.3 | N=1<br><1% | N=0<br>0% | N=21<br>8% | N=126<br>48% | N=112<br>43% |
| 2. | I ask students for feedback about my teaching effectiveness-what they liked and didn't like. | 257 | 3.1 | N=11<br>4% | N=34<br>13% | N=166<br>65% | N=38<br>15% | N=8<br>3% |
| 3. | When I teach a boring topic, I try to get through it as quickly as possible. | 249 | 3.0 | N=12<br>5% | N=53<br>21% | N=124<br>50% | N=47<br>19% | N=13<br>5% |
| 4. | I keep a teaching log/journal so I can reflect on the day/s activities, and it also helps me with future planning. | 259 | 2.3 | N=87<br>34% | N=76<br>29% | N=52<br>20% | N=23<br>9% | N=21<br>8% |
| 5. | I use my lesson plan book as a place for notations about which teaching strategies were successful or not. | 259 | 3.1 | N=39<br>15% | N=43<br>16% | N=75<br>29% | N=59<br>23% | N=43<br>17% |
| 6. | I use the same activities for all classes. | 245 | 3.3 | N=34<br>14% | N=59<br>24% | N=99<br>40% | N=44<br>18% | N=9<br>4% |
| 7. | I try to involve the students in daily activities that involve more than paper/pencil operations. | 258 | 4.2 | N=0<br><1% | N=2<br><1% | N=39<br>15% | N=114<br>44% | N=103<br>40% |
| 8. | I attend professional development workshops for new instructional ideas. | 257 | 4.0 | N=2<br><1% | N=4<br>1% | N=76<br>30% | N=92<br>36% | N=83<br>32% |
| 9. | I try to keep up with changes in my content field by attending professional development workshops or taking college-credit courses. | 259 | 4.0 | N=2<br><1% | N=6<br>2% | N=64<br>25% | N=96<br>37% | N=91<br>35% |
| | **Survey Questions** | **N** | **Ave** | **Strongly Disagree** | **Disagree** | **Somewhat Agree** | **Agree** | **Strongly Agree** |
| 10. | The easiest lessons for me to teach are the ones I find interesting. | 259 | 4.1 | N=2<br>1% | N=6<br>5% | N=64<br>17% | N=96<br>36% | N=91<br>41% |
| 11. | I think student involvement is critical to the success of any lesson. | 260 | 4.7 | N=1<br><1% | N=0<br><1% | N=4<br>1% | N=66<br>25% | N=189<br>73% |
| 12. | In my teaching I have found that the best way to provide new information to students is to present content and discuss it with the class. | 251 | 3.3 | N=5<br>2% | N=44<br>18% | N=99<br>39% | N=77<br>31% | N=26<br>10% |
| 13. | Today's textbook is up-to-date and presents good information on facts and concepts. | 242 | 2.9 | N=27<br>11% | N=49<br>20% | N=107<br>45% | N=51<br>21% | N=8<br>3% |
| 14. | The internet offers lots of instructional ideas, but it takes too long to locate them, and I'm too busy to spend hours trying to find them. | 257 | 3.3 | N=10<br>4% | N=38<br>15% | N=108<br>42% | N=68<br>26% | N=33<br>13% |
| 15. | Constantly trying to prepare for TAAS testing limits my teaching creativity. | 216 | 3.2 | N=20<br>9% | N=34<br>16% | N=80<br>37% | N=49<br>23% | N=33<br>15% |
| 16. | The knowledge base in my area of expertise is constantly changing and I sometimes feel overwhelmed with all of the new information. | 254 | 3.0 | N=12<br>5% | N=77<br>30% | N=93<br>37% | N=51<br>20% | N=21<br>8% |
| 17. | My teacher preparation program prepared me to be a reflective teacher. | 257 | 3.2 | N=16<br>6% | N=56<br>22% | N=77<br>30% | N=73<br>28% | N=35<br>14% |
| 18. | I am offered many staff development opportunities to improve my reflective practices. | 256 | 3.5 | N=10<br>4% | N=47<br>18% | N=68<br>27% | N=73<br>28% | N=58<br>23% |

## Chart 1. Average Ratings By Level of Teaching




### Survey Statements

| Statements 1-9<br>Rated from "Never=1" to "Always=5" | Statements 10-18<br>Rated from "Strongly Disagree=1" to "Strongly Agree=5" |
|---|---|
| 1. After I teach a lesson I think about what worked and what didn't. | 10. The easiest lessons for me to teach are the ones I personally find interesting. |
| 2. I ask students for feedback about my teaching effectiveness - what they liked and didn't like. | 11. I think student involvement is critical to the success of any lesson. |
| 3. When I teach a boring topic I try to get through it as quickly as possible. | 12. In my teaching I have found that the best way to provide new information to students is to present content and discuss it with the class. |
| 4. I keep a teaching log/journal so I can reflect on the day's activities and us it to help me with future planning. | 13. Today's textbooks are up-to-date and present good information on facts and concepts. |
| 5. I keep my lesson plan book as a place for notations about which teaching strategies were successful or not. | 14. The Internet offers lots of instructional ideas, but it takes too long to locate then, and I'm too busy to spend hours trying to find them. |
| 6. I use the same activities for all classes. | 15. Constantly trying to prepare for TAAS testing limits my teaching creativity. |
| 7. I try to involve the students in daily activities that involve more than paper/pencil operations. | 16. The knowledge base in my area of expertise is constantly changing and I sometimes feel overwhelmed with all of the new information. |
| 8. I attend professional development workshops for new instructional ideas. | 17. My teacher preparation program prepared me to be a reflective teacher. |
| 9. I try to keep up with changes in my content field by attending professional development workshops or taking college-credit courses. | 18. I am offered many staff development opportunities to improve my reflective practices. |